

Naturally Kentucky

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It is the mission of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission to protect Kentucky's natural heritage by: (1) identifying, acquiring and managing natural areas that represent the best known occurrences of rare native species, natural communities and significant natural features in a statewide nature preserves system; (2) working with others to protect biological diversity; and (3) educating Kentuckians as to the value and purpose of nature preserves and biodiversity.

Blackacre State Nature Preserve

Twenty-five years of preservation and education

By: Joyce Bender, Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission
David Wicks, Jefferson County Public Schools Center for Environmental Education
Carolyn Cromer, Blackacre Foundation Inc.

On March 19, 1979, the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission (KSNPC) dedicated Blackacre State Nature Preserve (SNP) as Kentucky's first state nature preserve. Twenty-five years later, the preserve has served thousands as a center for environmental education and a haven from urban development pressures. Blackacre SNP has provided a place where: Over a quarter of a million students from Kentuckiana have participated in field study programs that highlight stewardship responsibilities for Kentucky's land; more than 25,000 teachers have participated in professional development to enhance their environmental education teaching strategies; educational programs are offered for public, private, and parochial schools as well as the general public; and more than \$1.5 million has been raised and expended to restore and maintain Blackacre's historical structures and to purchase and protect surrounding land as a buffer from development.

For nearly 25 years, the partnership between KSNPC, the Blackacre Foundation and the Jefferson County Public Schools has combined diverse skills and resources in order to manage and maintain Blackacre State Nature Preserve. This unique management partnership is a testimony to what can be accomplished when agencies work together to pursue common goals and participate with a cooperative spirit.

During the past twenty-five years, all points of the compass around Blackacre have been rapidly developing. As the preserve witnesses the encroaching development, we are thankful for the foresight of Judge Macauley and Mrs. Emilie Smith, who owned the land before it became a preserve. In the words of Mrs. Smith, "It is the land that is sacred. The land can never be restored after bulldozers and blacktop. I can well imagine in 50 years what urban people will need most to see is not what our museums hold, but what did farmland look like."

The future of Blackacre State Nature Preserve is promising. The Kentucky Nature Preserves Act ensures that the land will be protected in perpetuity. The partnership is strong and the commitment is firm to assure a celebration of good works in another 25 years. KSNPC is committed to ensuring the ecological integrity of the land. The Jefferson County Public School system and the Blackacre Foundation are committed to continuing their outstanding environmental educational programs. The preserve's management partnership will continue to work and raise money to maintain the historic buildings and ensure the ecological integrity of the land well into the 21st century.

The future of Blackacre will be as the past 25 years have been, a place where the complimentary interests of education, preservation and ecological restoration are viewed as opportunities. We will work together to ensure that the citizens of the Commonwealth of Kentucky will continue to enjoy the magic that is Blackacre.

For more information on Blackacre State Nature Preserve, visit the following Web sites: Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission - www.naturepreserves.ky.gov; Blackacre Foundation Inc. - www.blackacrefoundation.org; and Jefferson County Public Schools Center for Environmental Education - www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/ee.

Volunteers and Staff Help One of Kentucky's Rarest Plants by David Skinner

One of the rarest plants in Kentucky is also one of the rarest on the entire earth. Short's goldenrod (*Solidago shortii*) is federally and state listed as an endangered species. Charles W. Short, an early Louisville physician and botanist, discovered Short's goldenrod in 1840 at the Falls of the Ohio. When the locks and dams were built on the Ohio River, this population of the plant was lost because of inundation. At the time, this was the only known population of Short's goldenrod. In 1939, E. Lucy Braun, a renowned botanist and ecologist, rediscovered the plant in northern Kentucky. Fortunately, some of these plants were on land that later became Blue Licks Battlefield State Park. To protect this imperiled plant, a portion of the park was dedicated as a state nature preserve in 1981. A two square mile area around Blue Licks harbored the only known Short's goldenrod populations, but in 2001 a new population was discovered in southern Indiana along the Blue River. Even with this new population, Short's goldenrod remains a critically imperiled species in need of protection and careful management.

In recent years, Commission staff have implemented a multifaceted approach to managing Short's goldenrod. Exotic invasive species, such as sweet clover, nodding thistle, crown vetch, and Kentucky 31 fescue, threaten to displace the goldenrod from its native habitat. Mechanical methods and the judicious use of herbicides are helping reclaim some of the lost habitat. Prescribed fire has also been implemented, which helps to eliminate small- to medium-sized trees that shade the goldenrod from the sunlight it needs for photosynthesis. Prescribed fires also help eradicate some exotic plant species and stimulate the growth of the Short's goldenrod and some other native species. Despite the benefits of fire, the prescribed burns are not intense enough to kill the larger trees. With the aide of Sierra Club and Native Plant Society volunteers, we have been clearing an area that had become overridden with red cedar trees. Nature preserve management practices often protect trees, but in this case the very common cedars are an impediment to a viable population of a very rare species. Also, there is a 1782 historical reference indicating that this area was nearly treeless. In addition to helping this federally endangered plant, we are restoring the Blue Licks' landscape to something more similar to what it was at the time of settlement.

To determine if the management efforts have been effective, Commission biologists have implemented a monitoring project. When the Short's goldenrod importance value (a statistic) from 2000 is compared to the 2002 value, it shows that the species is more than 200 percent more abundant! This management project involves a lot of hard, tedious work that is often done under difficult conditions; it is heartening to know that it is paying off.

For more than 200 years, Kentucky's original landscape and native plant and animal species have suffered great losses. It will never be possible to restore conditions back to what they were before settlement and development occurred, but thanks to dedicated volunteers and the employees of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission, some important examples of our natural heritage will always be with us.

Visit KSNPC's Web site at www.naturepreserves.ky.gov for information on volunteering.

Tiny Predator Rediscovered in Kentucky by Martina Hines

While most plants are rather docile, a few are actually quite predatory! Sundews (*Drosera* spp.) are carnivorous plants that survive by catching and digesting small insects that get stuck on sticky hairs that cover its leaf surfaces. They are small, annual plants and their seeds are dispersed by water. Sundews require bare, wet ground, such as the edges of ponds and swamps. They can also be found in road ruts and along animal trails.

This past field season, the spoon-leaved sundew (*Drosera intermedia*) was rediscovered in Russell County, Kentucky. This species had not been seen in Kentucky for well over 100 years. It is one of two species of sundew currently known from Kentucky. The other is dwarf sundew (*Drosera brevifolia*). Unlike some tropical carnivorous plants that can reach a height of eight feet, this sundew, at its best, extends about two inches above ground, exhibiting tiny, pale flowers. Usually, its small, reddish green leaves nearly touch the ground and blend in very nicely with its surroundings, thus making it difficult to spot. Biologists have intensely searched many acres of suitable habitat without finding sundews.

Continuous grazing, draining of wetlands and competition from exotic plant species are probably the main factors affecting sundews. While not rare nationwide, both species of sundew in Kentucky are each known from only one population, many miles from the nearest known population outside of the state. The one population of dwarf sundew, which grows in old tire ruts in Pulaski County, has been protected by The Nature Conservancy. And thanks to the enthusiastic cooperation of the owner of the newly discovered sundew population, this site also will be managed and protected.

Information on this and other rare plants is available by visiting KSNPC online at www.naturepreserves.ky.gov.

Director's Notes

by **Don Dott**
Executive Director

KSNPC was recently honored by its partner in environmental education, the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) Board of Education. At its March meeting the Board formally recognized KSNPC and the Blackacre Foundation on the 25th anniversary of their partnership. The result of this triad collaboration has been to: 1. protect the Blackacre landscape; 2. preserve the historic home and buildings dating to the late 1700s and mid 1800s, and 3. engage the students of Jefferson County schools in hands-on environmental education. David Wicks, Bryan Thompson and Donna Griffin have done an outstanding job of developing the Blackacre environmental education program and incorporating an environmental focus into other topical areas for both students and teachers in Jefferson County. About 10,000 students annually pass through the Blackacre preserve, some learning to sample water quality, some engaged in creative writing and some simply observing for the first time what a farmstead is like. KSNPC was honored by the Board's recognition, but duly gives the lion's share of the credit to the JCPS and the Blackacre Foundation for helping build this wonderful asset. It is very rewarding to know that the Commission's first preserve has been so effective at instilling an environmental awareness in so many young lives – a truly laudable accomplishment.

You may notice in this newsletter the lack of a land acquisition report by Ron Scott. I regret to announce that we have lost Ron to a new career path, where we wish him all success. Ron came to KSNPC from a position in Washington, D.C. with the Isaac Walton League, and I felt fortunate to gain an individual with his talents and abilities. But unfortunately those same attributes led him to a more challenging opportunity. Ron was very effective in convincing numerous landowners to sell us their dearly held lands, so they could forever be protected as part of our state nature preserve system. And he has left a good deal of work to carry forward until we are able to hire a new land specialist. Some of the active projects Ron had well under way include a major addition to the Hi-Lewis Pine Barrens SNP, in cooperation with the Southeast Education Foundation Board, which will retain ownership of the land. A new preserve in the wings lies in both Robertson and Nicholas counties and is home to a population of Short's goldenrod (*Solidago shortii*, federal and KSNPC endangered). This will be our second preserve for protection of this globally rare plant. Another new preserve in the works will be in Lincoln County. It is the largest known native grassland remnant in the Bluegrass Region, with a patchwork of grassy cedar barrens and open glades and some forest.

But in addition to these projects, one of the last things Ron did was to convene a meeting of the current land trusts in Kentucky. The purpose for this meeting was to encourage networking among the state land trusts and promote the establishment of more trusts. Kentucky currently has only about 10 private land trusts. We often receive calls from landowners around the state who want to see their land protected, and in some cases are even willing to donate it for that purpose. Odd as it may sound, we can not take most lands that are offered to us. First, our mission limits us to only nature preserve quality land – areas that support rare species or are an exemplary natural community. Quite often the callers have farmlands they wish to protect, which are outside our scope. Secondly, as a practical concern, with our limited resources and staff we have to be discriminating in what we take, because of the management or stewardship work, that is needed for nature preserves.

What is needed is more private land trusts in Kentucky that can work with conservation minded landowners to preserve their properties, whether farm land or simply green space. We refer such inquiries to other agencies, as appropriate, or a local land trust when one exists. Most of the existing trusts are in the “golden triangle” area of Louisville, Lexington and northern Kentucky. Much of the state is without private land preservation options. With Ron's impetus KSNPC has facilitated two meetings of Kentucky's current land trusts, and we plan for a third in late June. Hopefully we can get the ball rolling to facilitate greater interaction in the Kentucky land trust community and spur the creation of new trusts, or even an umbrella organization. This is another reason we will miss the contributions of Ron Scott. He was a very forward thinking (and busy) guy!

Did you know that less than 1 percent of Kentucky's \$7.5 billion budget supports environmental and natural resource programs?
(Source: *Kentucky's Environment*, Vol. 19, Issue 3)

Environmental Quality Commission 2004 Earth Day Award to Blackacre State Nature Preserve

The Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) honored the Blackacre Nature Preserve Partnership with an EQC Earth Day Award in recognition of the 35th anniversary of Earth Day.

During an April 22 award ceremony held at the Governor's Mansion, EQC Commissioner Gordon Garner said, "Blackacre's natural and cultural environment builds a sense of joy and wonder in the thousands of students who participate in field study and educational programs at the nature preserve."

For the past 25 years, the Kentucky State Nature Preserves, Blackacre Foundation and the Jefferson County Public Schools have worked together to protect the Blackacre Nature Preserve. The preserve, located near Jeffersontown in Jefferson County, is a 170-acre natural area dedicated to enhancing environmental literacy and to celebrating the important link between people, nature and the land.

Since 1979, more than a quarter million students have participated in educational field study programs at Blackacre. In addition, 25,000 teachers have participated in professional development at the preserve. Supporters have also raised \$3 million to restore and maintain Blackacre's historical structures and to purchase and protect surrounding land as a buffer from development.

Blackacre has been an integral part of the Jefferson County School District initiatives to ensure that all children read on grade level using the natural setting of the preserve.

For more information about EQC or about their Earth Day Awards program or the recipients, visit EQC online at: www.eqc.ky.gov.

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Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission

Quarterly Public Meeting

June 9, 2004

**Godbey Appalachian Center - Southeast Community College
Cumberland Campus, Cumberland, Kentucky**

Join us for our 9:30 a.m. meeting on June 9 in Cumberland in Harlan County. During our meeting, we will dedicate a new addition to the Hi-Lewis Pine Barrens State Nature Preserve. This 138-acre addition is owned by the Southeast Education Foundation Inc. (SEEF). The dedication indicates SEEF's foresight and commitment to protecting the rare Pine Barrens habitat of Pine Mountain.

After lunch, we will caravan to the Hi-Lewis State Nature Preserve for a site visit. This preserve is not open to the public, so this is a rare opportunity to visit this pine barrens natural community.

How to contact the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission:

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